

Sun-Earth Day Special: Arctic Impressions

Barrow, Alaska

Full Journal for 1-20-08

[Troy Cline]

"We shall not cease from Exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and to know the place for the first time. (T.S. Eliot)

My name is Troy Cline and welcome to a special Sun-Earth Day podcast. In recent podcasts we shared highlights of the Polar Gateways Arctic Circle Sunrise conference that took place in the northern most town in the U.S., Barrow, Alaska.

In this edition we'll take you back to Barrow but this time you'll experience it through the eyes of a middle school teacher from Rockville, Maryland, Dorian Janney. While there Dorian joined our team in a variety of educational activities including school visits, cultural excursions, webcasts and podcasts.

She also kept a journal of her entire experience complete with descriptive text and imagery that she emailed back to her students in Maryland at the end of each day. We asked Dorian if she would share her impressions of the Arctic with you. She graciously agreed.

During our next four podcasts you will hear from the author her self, Dorian Janney, as she reads to you directly from her journal. We've also included a variety of interviews with scientists and residents of Barrow as conducted by student reporter, Cara Mayo.

Don't forget to visit the Sun-Earth Day website for more information and the phenomenal imagery directly related to each of these podcasts.

So let's get started. Here's Dorian.

Day 1 in Barrow, Alaska

Greetings from the Top of the World! Hi, my name is Dorian Janney, and I am a middle school teacher from Rockville, Maryland. I got a wonderful opportunity to go to Barrow, Alaska, and although it meant I had to write a lot of substitute plans, I just couldn't say no. I do some work with NASA-Goddard on After School Astronomy Clubs and with developing curriculum for the Sun-Earth Connection Education



Forum, and they were planning to attend the Polar Gateways Conference. The first thing I did was to look up where Barrow, Alaska was, and was I ever surprised to find out that it is the farthest northern city on the North American continent.. Where I live in Maryland, I am at about 39 degrees north latitude, which means that when I look up in the night sky to find Polaris, the North Star, I see it at about a 40 degree angle from my zenith, which means directly above me. It also means that I live in an area that has fairly moderate winters; it gets cold and snows sometimes, but it rarely gets much below 32 degrees F, or 0 C. But, in Barrow, we are 320 miles above the Arctic Circle at about 66 degrees N latitude. This means that now Polaris should be directly above me, at my zenith- wow, I was excited about the possibility of seeing the stars in a different position. So, I wrote my sub plans, went out and bought a warm parka, warm boots, lots of warm socks, and some other clothing that would keep me warm in temperatures that went to 65 degrees below zero!

Although I actually did get here last night, it wasn't until about 8 at night Alaska time, which is four hours earlier than the time it was when I left home. Because Barrow is so far away, I had to take four planes to get here, and it took over 16 hours. The airport was tiny, which was such a nice change after being in huge airports with moving sidewalks all the way here. This airport had only one little room, and the luggage was brought in by two guys who were dressed in big parkas. I had a great time chatting with some of the people in the waiting area, and I found out that two of them were also teachers. One was a speech therapist who was flying out to work with teachers



in some of the smaller villages in the North Slope area, and the other was a teacher who was giving workshops to teachers in Barrow before she flew off on a



small plane to work with teachers in the smaller villages. We chatted while I waited to get my luggage, and before long, the waiting room had cleared out, and my luggage wasn't there. It turned out that my luggage didn't make it on this flight. So, I had only my tennis shoes and my ski jacket until my luggage came the next day with warmer clothes. What could I do but head out to find my hotel. It was right across the street, and it wasn't really too cold as I walked over there. It was a

small hotel, but very cozy and warm. I went to sleep after reading about Alaska for awhile, and wondered what adventures awaited me!

When I woke up the next morning, it was about 8 am, and it was still pitch black outside. The next plane wasn't going to arrive until 11 am, and finally, around 9:30 am, I decided to brave the cold and the polar bears and take a walk. The weather report said that the high would be 33 degrees today, and the low 16-above zero, so it was actually a pretty warm day here in Barrow!



I walked down the road to the Arctic Sea, and could see the full moon still shining away at 10 am. When I looked up, I was thrilled to see Polaris, the North Star, directly above me! The Big Dipper was in a different position in the sky than I had ever seen, and I felt so at home to see some of my good friends from my home skies right there with me.

I found a Mexican restaurant called “Pepes” to have breakfast in- did you know they have both a Mexican and a Japanese restaurant here? When I left Pepe’s around 11 am, it was much lighter outside. But I was feeling pretty cold, so I really hoped that my luggage was coming on the next plane. When I got back to the hotel, I spent some time in the lobby chatting with one of the teachers I had met and two other women who were visiting Barrow from Fairbanks. I learned many things about the schools in Fairbanks and in two of the smaller villages on the North Slope. It is really neat to travel so far and meet so many interesting people who are willing to share their lives and work.

Yippee- my luggage did come in on the plane that had come in- only two flights come into Barrow every day, weather permitting, and there are no roads in or out of town. After watching one of the playoff football games on the television- there are some things one must do, even in Alaska!- I went out on another walk. By 2:30 pm, it was pretty light, even though the sun would never come up above the horizon. I noticed snowmobiles and ATVs riding through town, and many of the drivers appeared to be middle-school age kids- what fun! I saw lots of neat things- most of the houses were rather small, and were made out of wood. They were raised off the ground about a foot or more, and many had big dogs on chains in their front yards. I found out later that these dogs loved to be outside, and protected their owners from polar bears!



There was sign that said Alaska on it, and had lots of pointers on it that gave how many miles it was to other cities in the world. We were pretty far away from everything.

I found the Arctic and the Chutcki Sea, and both were mostly frozen over, but there was a black line going through the water close to shore. This is known as a “lead”, and is a break near shore in the ice. The black that I was seeing was the ocean water. Apparently it was very unusual to have a lead at this time of year, something that the people here fear is related to global warming. Later, in the spring, whales come close to shore using these leads. I saw blocks of ice going down the lead in some places, and could imagine what it would be like to see seals and polar bears on these. This was exciting to really be here in the Arctic- I had to pinch myself, though my nice warm thick parka, to make sure it was all real.



[Troy Cline]

We would like to give a special thanks to Dorian for taking the time to share her incredible journey with us.

In the next Arctic Impressions podcasts we'll hear more from Dorian's journal. She will share her experience with the Inupiat culture and she'll also fill us in on a very special treat she enjoyed called... "Muktuk".

We are very interested in hearing your questions and comments about the Sun-Earth Day podcasts. If you have something to say, send an email to sunearthdaypodcast@mail630.gsfc.nasa.gov .

For all other details about the Sun-Earth Day program including information about our past SED themes be sure to visit our website at sunearthday.nasa.gov.

While there, don't forget to register in order to receive Sun-Earth Day updates!